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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 004894

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SUBJECT: TURKEY'S SUPREME MILITARY COUNCIL PUTS A STRONG  
TEAM AT THE TOP

REF: ANKARA

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The early announcement of Turkish Land Forces Commander (TLFC) GEN Buyukanit's appointment as the next Chief of the Turkish General Staff (ref a) was not the only surprise to come out of the annual Supreme Military Council (YAS) meeting. After just one year as Deputy Chief of the General Staff (DCHOD), GEN Kosaner was reassigned as Jandarma Commander, and Buyukanit's former TLFC Chief of Staff GEN Saygun assumed the number two slot as DCHOD. The rank of Special Forces Commander was elevated from a two-star to a three-star general and the two-star incumbent was sidelined, while his predecessor, Servet Yoruk, now a Lieutenant General, was brought back in to take over. LTG Erdagi, who successfully commanded ISAF for Turkey, was passed over for promotion due to an ongoing trial on corruption charges. Other changes were more predictable. GEN Basbug, with whom we work well, moved from First Army Command to succeed Buyukanit at the helm of TLFC. Naval Forces Commander Karahanoglu and Air Force Commander Comert, who were assigned in 2005, remained in place. Seventeen personnel were dismissed for disciplinary reasons, in line with recent years. END SUMMARY.

ASSEMBLING THE TEAM  
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12. (C) Speculation continues to surround the announcement of TLFC GEN Buyukanit's selection as CHOD one day before the start of the YAS. In addition to suggestions that the timing was a peace offering from the AKP government to TGS in the wake of recent civil-military tensions, press have suggested that President Sezer pressed for the early announcement following the circulation of a series of inflammatory and anti-Semitic emails attempting to defame Buyukanit's character in the weeks preceding the YAS meeting. According to Dr. Huseyin Bagci (protect), a professor of international and security relations at Middle East Technical University, all of the YAS decisions were negotiated between TGS and the government in July, at which time PM Erdogan purportedly also agreed not to run for the Presidency in May 2007. Whatever the circumstances, Buyukanit's selection has been generally hailed as positive.

13. (C) When he assumes command on August 30, Buyukanit will be joined by his former Land Forces Chief of Staff, GEN Ergin Saygun. Like Buyukanit, Saygun has an open, gregarious personality and a direct communication style. He shares

Buyukanit's frustration with the continued PKK violence and has expressed to US military personnel his desire to personally lead the charge against the terrorist organization in southeastern Turkey. As TLFC COS, Saygun periodically met with USG military and civilian officials to discuss security cooperation and other issues.

¶4. (C) Saygun admitted to us his dissatisfaction with the Undersecretariat for Defense Industries' (SSM) attack helicopter program, in which no US firm participated, and which left Turkey with the choice of a South African or Italian helicopter. He openly admitted his preference for US equipment and inquired about the parameters of the US Foreign Military Sales program. We expect to continue this regular exchange with him at TGS. Saygun will be succeeded by GEN Atila Isik as Land Forces COS, a quieter version of Kosaner who doesn't question his orders. Isik moves over from the Defense Ministry, where he was Undersecretary, after receiving his fourth star.

#### KOSANER CHANGES COURSE

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¶5. (C) GEN Isik Kosaner, who received his fourth star in 2004 and his assignment as DCHOD in 2005, will move over to take command of the Jandarma following the retirement of GEN Turkeri. Kosaner has one more year in rank than GEN Saygun, who succeeds him as DCHOD, but is his polar opposite in personality. Reserved and rather stiff, Kosaner is described as a traditional officer who keeps his counsel but does not exude confidence. Several press accounts have suggested that his assignment to the Jandarma may be intended to preserve his upward mobility while allowing Buyukanit to reward his TLFC deputy with a job that puts him in line for CHOD and to

keep at his side a DCHOD who shares both his style and his priorities. The Jandarma command is not traditionally a path to the top but Jandarma commanders have gone on to command the Land Forces. As Jandarma commander, Kosaner will have a seat at NSC meetings and, in 2008, if Basbug becomes CHOD as expected, Kosaner will be the highest ranking Land Forces officer. Following tradition, Kosaner could succeed Basbug at TLFC chief, putting him in line to succeed Basbug as CHOD in 2010.

#### BUYUKANIT'S SUCCESSOR LIKE-MINDED

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¶6. (C) GEN Ilker Basbug's move from the First Army Command in Istanbul to succeed Buyukanit at the helm of the TLFC follows the traditional path to CHOD that leads from DCHOD to First Army Command to the Land Forces Command and finally to TGS Chief. Basbug is thought to sate Buyukanit's thinking on the role of the military, the PKK, and the importance of the US/TU relationship. Our relationship with him has been generally positive. An avid reader of English-language political analysis, Basbug exchanged books and discussed authors with former Ambassador Edelman while DCHOD. He welcomed US visitors and still maintains a close relationship with USEUCOM Commander Gen Jones and with CJCS Gen Pace. Officers who served under him, however, have called him difficult, a stern taskmaster who accepts no counsel and believes he has all the answers.

¶7. (C) Aegean Army Commander Remzi Tuncel will succeed Basbug as First Army Commander for one year, when he reaches the mandatory retirement age of 65. His departure will open up the possibility for GEN Saygun or GEN Kosaner to take that job and continue their upward climb. Second Army Commander Sukru Sariisik will move to the Aegean Command behind Tuncel.

Speaking at a Change-of-Command ceremony, Sariisik reportedly warned that Turkey had strayed from Ataturk's principles and said that a "religious-based structure wants to reverse the gains won by the principles and reforms of Ataturk and take Turkey back to the totalitarian darkness of the Middle Ages." He called separatist terrorism the greatest threat to the country and suggested that Western countries and certain Turkish groups were supporting the PKK

"in the name of democracy." Like Tuncel, Sariisik must retire in 2007. LTG Hasan Igsiz, a Buyukanit protege, will replace Sariisik. Igsiz, a US Army Staff College graduate, will be an able field commander of the main Turkish Army entity opposing the PKK in the southeast.

#### REIGNING IN THE SPECIAL FORCES

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18. (C) Command of the almost 6,000-force strong Special Forces was elevated from a two-star to a three-star general, possibly in response to the May 2006 exposure of the so-called Atabeyler Gang, a group of civilians and military personnel accused of plotting to kill PM Erdogan and overthrow the government, according to press reports. Among those arrested in a raid of homes were several Special Forces officers. This event added to a series of incidents that portrayed the Special Forces as out of control. As the only solid intel-collecting military entity, the role of the SF is important. Following the change in command, outgoing two-star General Hakki Ciyar, known more for his love of the good life than his leadership abilities, will be succeeded by LTG Servet Yoruk, who preceded Ciyar as SF commander as a two-star. Yoruk is considered a strong, but fair, commander who may tighten discipline among his troops. Under Yoruk, the two existing SF brigades will be reorganized as units, opening the way for further expansion.

#### GENERAL'S TRIAL A SIGN OF THE TIMES

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19. (C) Third Corps Commander LTG Ethem Erdagi, who led the successful Turkish command of ISAF VII, was eligible to receive his fourth star but was passed over for promotion. In a sign of changing times, this well-respected general is on trial for alleged improprieties during the construction of the Eighth Army Corps Headquarters in Elazig and has already relinquished several personal properties as a result of the investigation. Such public trials were unheard of until recent years as Turkey implemented military reforms as part of its EU accession process. Military officers charged with

a crime are not eligible for promotion. He will remain at the command of Third Corps in Istanbul for the next year and, depending on the outcome of the case against him, could be considered for promotion in 2007.

#### OTHER NOTABLE CHANGES

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110. (C) Other changes included a position swap between Land Forces Training Doctrine Commander GEN Ismail Kocman and GEN Orhan Yoney, Commander of the Third Army in Erzincan, in the northeast. BG Levent Turkmen, who commanded the Tenth Tanker Wing at Incirlik Air Base, will take over the Air Force Academy command. A volatile personality made worse when he drank, Turkmen was a difficult interlocutor. He will be succeeded by BG Mehmet Yilmaz Erdogan who is currently assigned as Chief of Logistics, Plans and Coordination for the Air Force. Naval Forces Commander ADM Yener Karahanoglu and Air Forces Commander Gen Faruk Comert, both appointed in 2005, will remain in place. In total, 32 flag officers were promoted in rank and 47 colonels were promoted to general officer.

#### DISMISSAL NUMBERS REMAIN STEADY

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111. (SBU) Seventeen military personnel were dismissed from TGS for disciplinary problems, immoral or unprofessional acts and/or fundamentalist activities. This number is in line with dismissals in recent years. In 2005, 11 individuals were dismissed; 12 in 2004; 18 in 2003. The largest number of dismissals in recent years was 46 in 2004, just months before the Justice and Development Party (AKP) took over the government.

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WILSON